

Reinvention:

How do we go from who we thought we were “supposed to” be to who we want to become today and in the future?

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As I live my life, I reflect on how each decade seems better than the one prior. I have heard many people say they wish they could go back to a certain age, because that was a better time than now. But I'm of the opposite mind. In my life, each year unfolds and turns out better than the one before it, and things in my life get better as I get older. I have become more and more aware of how short life is, and I want to come to the end of my life without regrets. I knew that I would have those regrets if I didn't make an active, conscious choice about doing the things I knew I wanted to do. I began to form a “goals list” in my head of the dreams and plans and experiences I wanted for myself. And I am pleased to say that I need to constantly add to the list, because that process is working well in my life.

The process of “reinvention” is best discussed from the beginning. How do we become “invented” in the first place, and then how and why do we need to “reinvent” ourselves? Obviously, the first people who “invent” us are our families of origin. They are the first people who “imprint” on us ideas of who we are “supposed to be.” Many of these “imprints” are from gender roles/definitions. And some are from our cultural background. Still other imprints come from our socioeconomic background or family history. Clearly, there are many different first “imprints” which serve to “invent” us during our early years.

As we continue the journey from childhood into adult life, many other factors influence us. Often, somewhere along the way we're told what we “should be” when we grow up, and it just doesn't feel right for us. So now what happens? We might choose to reject the idea at those times when that “this doesn't feel right” sensation comes over us. Some of us choose early on to take a stand, claiming the right to choose our own path. But others of us, who are more sensitive and fearful of the emotional rejection of our origin families or others whom we allow to have emotional power over us, might try to walk along the road that was predetermined from childhood. Eventually these people also come to a place where they know they need to find their own way, when the “this doesn't feel right” sensation wins over. The desire to change becomes strong, even if it involves taking that fearful step of risking criticism or negative reactions from others. Regardless of the timing, there comes a defining moment for each of us.

How do we recognize those defining moments? Often it involves acknowledging our body's physical reactions to the stressors of emotional unhappiness. Symptoms like migraine headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers, pinched nerves and others may be connected with the stressors that come from working in a job that isn't the right fit. Or maybe it's the way we dread having to get up out of bed each day, only to go live a life that is not close to the one we desire. Once we finally start to connect the links of those physical symptoms to our emotional and psychological well-being, we are ready to take the next step on a road toward a life more happily lived.

How do we take the next step? The process often begins with realizing how important it is to let go of the “old messages” that really don’t work in our current lives. This is a struggle for most people, and it is easy to keep turning away from who we really want to become. The “letting go” is SO HARD!!! We often cling tightly to old relationships with people who might never have been supportive of us. However, based on their status in our old lives, they hold a very powerful place in our heads, and the volume of their “voices” is LOUD!

What does it take for us to “turn down the volume” on the “old voices” and learn to listen for the messages that are supportive, encouraging and accepting of who we are called to be today? We must each realize that these new messages come from within us. When we have that awareness, and we know the strength and determination of the person inside us, then we’re well on the way toward “reinventing” ourselves. We can move forward in a positive, empowered and action-oriented manner to become the person we always knew we wanted to be.

Does “reinvention” happen only once? Absolutely not. We are a “work in progress,” and “reinvention” is a lifetime process. As we take each next step, we must remember to let go of anything that is not working or not needed. When we learn to pack a little lighter, to clear out the unnecessary clutter, the forward movement takes less effort and because it’s less burdensome. Will we step backward from time to time? Certainly. Something will come up; an illness or death, change in marital status, an issue with a child, or with a friendship. Those kinds of emotionally charged situations can always throw us off our game, or force us to change our direction, albeit unwillingly. But if we remember to keep the focus on ourselves, keep firm in our resolve to choose what is BEST for us, those “detours” don’t deter us away from the main road for very long., and we soon find our way back to the forward-moving, self-fulfilled, well-lived happy life highway!